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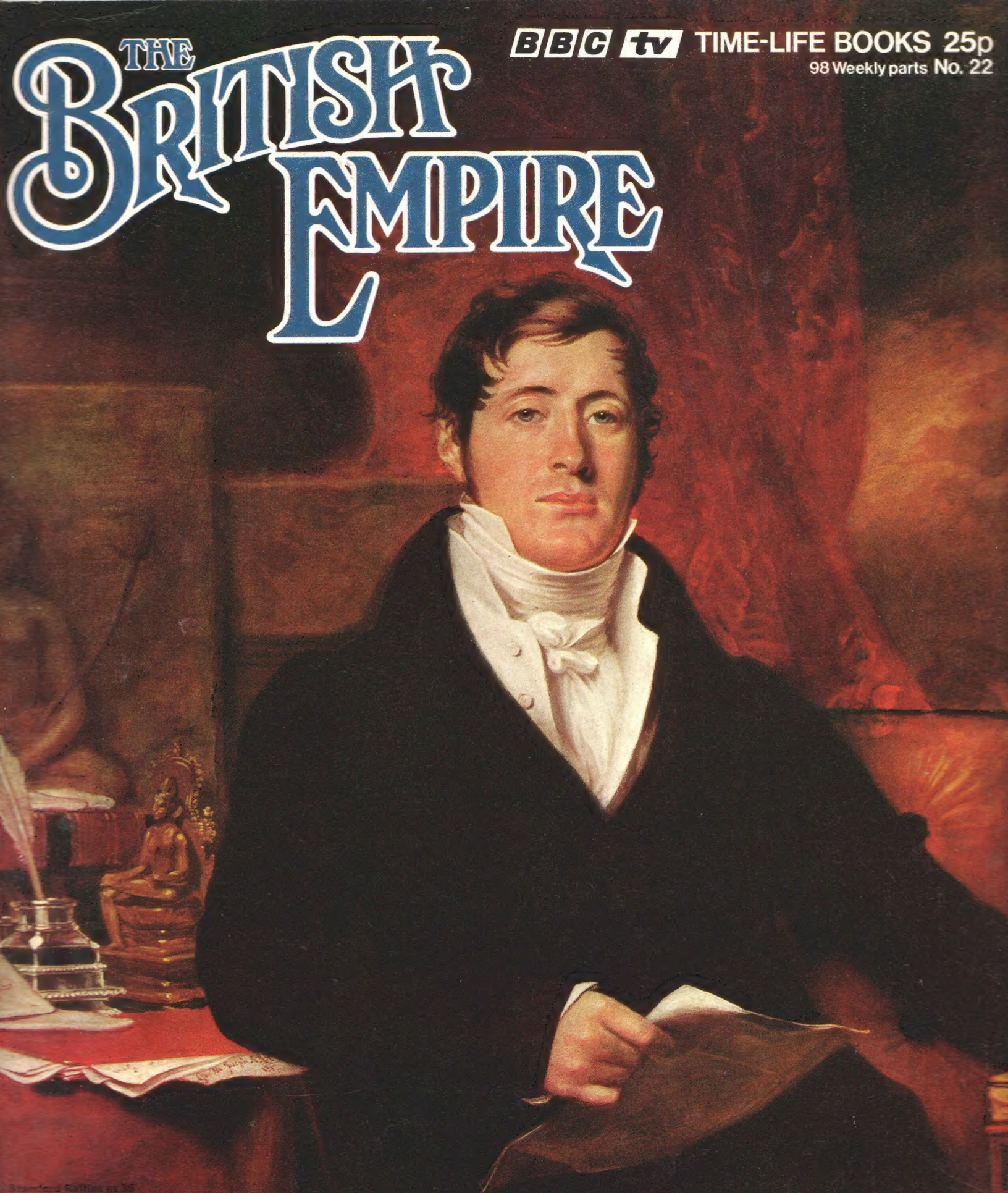

BUCCANEERS OF THE EAST

Raffles of Singapore Brooke of Sarawak

Australia & New Zealand 70c South Africa 70c Canada 95c

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Sales Director George Gillespie
Consultants D. K. Fieldhouse, Lecturer in Commonwealth History and Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford
A. F. Madden, Reader in Commonwealth Government and Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford

BARRY PREE, was born in South Australia in 1939. He was Resident Playwright with the Elizabethan Theatre Trust in Melbourne before coming to Europe. After brief work with the Royal Shakespeare Company he became a freelance writer and is currently working on a forthcoming study, *The White Rose*, the history of a little-known student resistance movement in Nazi Germany.

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BY THE WAY

Among the many letters received by the editors have been a certain number that revealed considerable personal experience of life in different parts of the Empire. The depth of emotion for and against the Empire displayed in this correspondence suggested to us the possibility of preparing an issue the bulk of which would be provided by readers themselves. A final decision must await the results of this request to all of our readers who are interested to submit letters dealing with this subject. Three possible lines of approach come to mind that readers might find helpful:

1. Personal experiences of those who have lived and worked in imperial areas.

2. Anecdotes about such people, whether they were well-known personalities or whether they fulfilled humbler roles – for example an otherwise unknown campaigner in the Mutiny or a prospector for gold in South Africa.

3. Opinions about the Empire. This is wide open to anyone, young or old. Where do you think the Empire's virtues lay and where its faults? What does it teach us now – or is Britain's imperial past utterly irrelevant to present-day events?

All this material will be treated in strict confidence and no names will be revealed without the consent of the person concerned. It will be greatly appreciated if letters are typewritten. Any personal property will be treated with care and returned, if so required.

We have no idea what this request will reveal but its potential is enormous. Most of the 19th Century is accessible through memory, anecdote and family record. After all, the grandfather of a man now aged 60 could have been born as far back as 1820, long before the Empire reached its height.

But it's not only the past that makes fascinating reading; we would like to be able to compare differences in attitude between generations, and between those who have never visited former imperial areas and those who lived there.

Now – over to you!

CONTENTS

589. Buccaneers of the East
An introduction to the men whose drive led to an unexpected expansion of the imperial frontier in the Far East.

590. The Founder of Singapore
Thomas Stainford Raffles' career and his acquisition of one of the greatest ports of the East.

595. Picture Essay: Raffles
Three of Raffles' greatest achievements: his administration of Java and Singapore, and his massive work as a naturalist.

603. The Legacy of Raffles
Singapore burgeons into a great trading port as British power slowly extends through all the Malayan peninsula.

606. The White Rajahs of Sarawak
James Brooke's empire-building in Borneo and his establishment of a dynasty remembered with affection in Sarawak.

609. Picture Essay: Brooke
Rajah Brooke's suppression of one Sarawak tradition – piracy – and his failure to suppress another – head-hunting.

616. King of the Cocos Islands
The strange story of John Clunies-Ross, who took possession of a remote group of Indian Ocean islands.

Cover: Thomas Stamford Raffles at 36 displayed the cool self-confidence that was to stand him in good stead when he founded Singapore two years later.

BUCCANEERS OF THE EAST

By Barry Pree

Empire came to the Malayan archipelago, not through the application of official policy, but as the result of startling individualistic action by two far-sighted adventurers: Stamford Raffles and "Rajah" James Brooke.

In the early 19th Century, the Dutch had long dominated the area, and the British, now officially allied to the Dutch in the war against Napoleon, had no ambition to challenge them. But Raffles, undeterred by short-term political considerations, won Company support and, backed by its troops, drove ahead with its own empire-building programme to found Singapore in 1819. Then, 30 years later, James Brooke, by pure force of personality, manipulated himself into a position of power in strife-torn Borneo, and after 20 years fulfilled his ambition to win a place for his territory, Sarawak, within the Empire.

Meanwhile, John Clunies-Ross, a forceful Scottish sea captain, had established himself on the previously unoccupied Cocos Islands, 700 miles out in the Indian Ocean. It was a bizarre footnote to the chapter of private adventuring that turned Britain into the dominant power in South-East Asia

I. The Founder of Singapore

The spirit of the legendary Raffles of Singapore dominated Britain's 19th-Century Empire in the Far East. Romantic, adventurous, ambitious and individualistic, he turned his unlikely dream of permanent British authority in South-East Asia into reality. At his chosen base, Singapore, which was in 1819 no more than a mangrove swamp inhabited by only a few hundred fishermen, he laid the foundations for a port that within 25 years was to become "the gateway to the East," a bastion of the British Empire for well over a century.

Thomas Stamford Raffles was born in 1781, the son of a sea captain. He joined the East India Company in London in 1795 as a 14-year-old clerk with the modest salary of £70 a year – perhaps £500 in current terms. He was brilliant, with an astonishing will to learn and an inexhaustible supply of energy. For the next ten years, he read voraciously in his spare time, often through the night. His employers recognized his ability and dedication. In 1805, at the age of 24, and with a spectacular increase in salary to £1,500 a year, he was appointed an assistant to help administer Penang Island off the Malayan Peninsula.

Around the time of his appointment, a dark, striking and intelligent widow of 34, Mrs. Olivia Fancourt, came to East India House to claim a pension owing her since the death of her husband, a Company employee, a few years previously. Raffles, though ten years her junior, proposed almost at once, and they were married in March, 1805, one month before departing for the East Indies.

At this time, the British had only recently begun to challenge the monopoly of the Dutch, who had dominated trade in the area for the previous 150 years from two major bases: Malacca and Java.

British interest – principally that of the East India Company – was prompted by three factors: the need for a secure, conveniently situated port of call for British ships that carried the £19,000,000 of annual trade between India and China; the need for a naval base for the refitting of English ships engaged in the Indian seas; and the attractions of the still largely untapped sources of wealth in the South-East Asian market. It was for these reasons that the East India Company had bought Penang from a local ruler in 1786.

Soon afterwards, war in Europe became an excuse for further extension of Company control. In 1794, the French overran Holland. It seemed possible that they might one day seize Dutch overseas possessions as well, thus providing themselves with a scattering of bases from which to harass British shipping. To safeguard their position in the Far East, the British occupied Dutch Malacca down the coast from Penang. This was the situation in the area at the time of Raffles' departure for the East.

On the voyage out of Penang, he immersed himself in Oriental studies: he was a sensitive and devoted scholar and on the six-month journey he acquired a working use of the Malay language and a comprehensive knowledge of the history and customs of the Malayan people.

The Malaya to which he turned his attention was only a little larger than England. Three-quarters of the land area consisted of variegated forests, densely packed with rich ferns and exotic flowers, and sheltering countless thousands of monkeys, 130 varieties of snakes, 800 different sorts of butterflies and 200 kinds of dragonflies. The mountains were high, the rivers – swarming with crocodiles – often disproportionately wide. Here and there, hacked out of the open land of valleys or along coastal strips, were gently landscaped rice-fields.

It was primitive, beautiful, exciting: "The glory of the Eastern morning, the freshness and the fragrance of the forest, the sultry heat of plains and slopes of eternal green on which the moisture-charged clouds unceasingly pour fatness – these are the home of the Malay! . . ." wrote a late 19th-Century administrator, Sir Frank Swettenham, in a burst of lyricism rare for a civil servant.

From the beginning of time the Malayan Peninsula had acted as a bridge between peoples and cultures. The ancestors of the modern Malay people are thought to have settled on the coast towards the beginning of the Christian era. Chinese, Indian and Arab traders visited the peninsula during the first millennium of the Christian era: many settled there, bringing and disseminating their own religious and cultural traditions, first Buddhism, then Hinduism and, finally, Islam, the religion of most Malays today.

Early British visitors to the peninsula found the individual Malay intelligent, courteous to an extreme, altogether more civilized than many of his counterparts elsewhere in the East, conservative, supremely self-confident, and proud of his country. He was also, in British eyes, lazy and untidy, and capable of sudden, terrifying acts of violence – the Malayan word *amok* came into English to describe the wildness of a Malay seized with one of these fits.

As soon as he arrived at Penang, Raffles set out to demonstrate that his efficiency was as impressive as his store of knowledge. Among the junior administrators of the settlement there was no one to rival him, and soon he became indispensable: in March, 1807, he was appointed Chief Secretary to the Governor.

Raffles was not only knowledgeable and efficient, he was also popular. A Malay called Abdullah, who was later to become his clerk, and whose writings provide the best portrait of Raffles in those early days, left this description of his master: "He was most courteous in his intercourse with all men. He had a sweet expression on his face, was extremely affable and liberal, and listened with attention when people spoke to him."

But this gentle exterior hid a tenacious ambition. Late in 1807, Raffles went on sick-leave to Malacca, which under Dutch rule had become so dilapidated that the British were tempted to abandon it rather than face the task of refortifying it. During his stay at Malacca, Raffles wrote a lengthy report not only favouring the retention of Malacca, but also suggesting the extension of British power into Java, another Dutch base that might one day be seized by the French. This was the first real indication of his ambitions for the extension of Empire in the East, and it brought him to the notice of his future patron and protector Lord Gilbert Minto, the East India Company's Governor-General of India.

As a result of Raffles' memorandum, the British decided to hold Malacca; and in 1810, Minto created for the headstrong, clever Raffles the post of "Agent to the Governor-General in Malaya." The main purpose of the appointment was to enable

The forts on this 1635 map of Malacca testify to the power of Holland's Far Eastern empire, which dominated the Spice Islands until the British arrived in the early 19th Century.

him to develop his plans for an expedition against Dutch Java. Minto was delighted with the scheme, and within a few months ships were ready to put it into effect.

Both Minto and Raffles sailed with the invasion fleet that left Malacca on June 11, 1811, and arrived at Batavia seven weeks later.

The invasion was a walk-over. The Dutch, uncertain whether to fight for this their finest Eastern colony or surrender to a supposed ally as they had in Malacca, abandoned the town of Batavia and put up a feeble resistance at a near-by fort. British artillery breached the wall, troops, under a foolhardy Irishman named Sir Robert Gillespie, dashed in, and the Dutch capitulated. Three weeks later Minto announced that Java had been annexed by the East India Company. Raffles was appointed Lieutenant-Governor, with a salary of £8,000 a year.

Raffles set out to rule Java in accordance with Minto's last instructions: "Let us do all the good we can while we are here." The potential for good was large. Under the Dutch, the peasants had been told what to grow, and had been paid rock-bottom prices so that the Dutch traders made enormous profits when the goods were resold in Holland. The Javanese were, in addition, taxed even on the miserable prices they received, in order to pay for Dutch administration. Raffles, hoping for long-term economic benefits for the Company, planned to turn Java into a thriving trading community. He ended the Dutch system of feudal dependency. He decreed that the peasants could grow what they liked and sell it at market price. He clamped down on slavery, forbidding further imports of slaves and establishing means by which human chattels could win their freedom.

These policies were revolutionary and the Javanese rapidly came to idolize Raffles – the more so because he showed a deep and passionate interest in the land and the people. He immersed himself in the archaeology, zoology, botany and literature of Java. He persuaded the Javanese Sultans to provide him with historical source material. He sent home to the East India Company's Oriental Museum specimens of animals, plants, birds and insects. He surveyed ancient sites previously unknown.

The Company's directors, however, were impressed by none of this. They agreed that long-term investment could make Java a profitable concern – but what was the point, they asked perceptively, since it was likely that once the French were finally defeated the British would hand back to the Dutch their former Far Eastern possessions?

Raffles' life in Java was further complicated when a malicious attack was made on his character and administration by General Gillespie, the former commander of troops in Java, who had led the storming of the Dutch fort.

Gillespie had been given a high place in Raffles' administrative system as a reward for his gallantry in the invasion. His gallantry, however, was nothing more than unthinking rashness based on an immutable faith in his own invulnerability (a fault that was to lead to his death in action against the Gurkhas three years later). Confident in his own abilities of judgement and leadership, he was jealous and malicious when balked. He took bitter offence when Raffles cut expenses by ordering some of the General's sepoy troops back to India. To save further trouble and to protect his protégé, Minto then recalled Gillespie to India.

There, Gillespie laid serious accusations against Raffles. Behind a facade of public service, he said, Raffles had been feathering his own nest. His measures were impractical and he had a total ignorance of simple economics. To the Company's directors in London, who saw only that Raffles' measures had not as yet paid off, the charges bore some weight.

Raffles at once set to work to rebut the accusations. In his reply, a comprehensive review of his administration, he massed statistics, documents and sworn statements into a whole volume of evidence that proved Gillespie's charges to be so much rubbish.

His efforts were enough to prevent immediate action being taken against him. But, two years later, his career was almost ended by three strokes of ill-fortune. His wife, Olivia, died in circumstances about which nothing is known; his friend and protector, Minto, died of pneumonia after standing in the rain beside the grave of a dear friend; and after the French were defeated at Waterloo, Java was handed back to the Dutch. Raffles found himself out of a job, and prepared to return home.

In London, however, he was already a man of wide repute – not for his administrative reforms in Java, which aroused little interest and were anyway incomplete, but as a scholar and Orientalist. His archaeological and zoological work was admired by Sir Joseph Banks, the President of the Royal Society, and by the heir to the throne, Princess Charlotte. Whatever the ill-founded opinion of the Company directors, he had become a man

to be reckoned with at home in social and scientific circles.

Raffles left Java in March, 1816. On his way to embark, according to his aide-de-camp, he was "accompanied by all the respectable inhabitants of Batavia who took their leave of him with tears."

Raffles arrived in London to find himself a celebrity. London society found him fascinating and charming. He was the sensation of the day. The Queen called to view his famous collection of Javanese *objets d'art*; and his rise thereafter was truly meteoric. In March, 1817, he was made a Fellow of the Royal Society; in April, he published his *History of Java*, which he dedicated to the Prince Regent; and in May he was knighted.

Amidst the adulation heaped upon him by society, the Company directors had little alternative but to clear his name officially; they admitted "the utter groundlessness of the charges against him in so far as they affected his honour."

The last words are significant: the Company was prepared to recognize his personal qualities, but was not ready to admit the wisdom of his reforms in Java. His reinstatement was not complete, and he was offered the relatively minor post of Lieutenant-Governor in the almost forgotten backwater of Bencoolen, on the west coast of Sumatra.

He accepted, just when he seemed to hold all London in the palm of his hand. Why? Partly because throughout his life he was driven by a sense of his mission in the East, and partly because London had little more to offer: he had found fulfilment of a different sort when in February, 1817, he married Sophia Hull. Though bereft of fortune, rank and beauty, she was level-headed and loving, and he found lasting happiness in their stable relationship.

Raffles arrived in Bencoolen in March, 1818. The Dutch were now back in the East Indies and in a stronger position than ever before. Raffles stressed the urgency of the new situation: "Every day, every hour, that the Dutch are left to themselves, their influence increases

The outline colours on this 1856 map of the East Indies show which territories were claimed by various European rivals for the area's wealth. Britain had returned Java, the former British headquarters in South-East Asia, to the Dutch in 1816. The most important British base was the island of Singapore (inset), the key to the Malacca Straits, the major Eastern trade route.

and our difficulties will be proportionately increased." He determined to find a base from which the Company could compete with the Dutch.

His position was now a strong one, for among his admirers he could count Lord Moira, Minto's successor as Governor-General. Moira did everything he could to make up for the off-hand treatment meted out to Raffles by the Company in the past. Raffles was invited to Calcutta, and found in Moira a willing accomplice to the bold plan that he had formulated: to slip ashore on a strategically placed island, one not already occupied by the Dutch, and negotiate an agreement with the local ruler to establish a trading post. Only in this way, Raffles argued, could the China trade be secured and the East Indies be prevented from becoming an exclusively Dutch preserve.

On December 7, 1818, Raffles set out from Calcutta in search of his new base. Rhio, an island off the tip of the Malayan Peninsula, was his first choice, with the near-by island of Singapore as an alternative. "I much fear," he wrote, "the Dutch have hardly left us an inch of ground to stand upon." His fears were justified: when he arrived in Malayan waters on December 31, he learned that the Dutch had already negotiated the occupation of Rhio. Raffles ordered his small fleet to sail for Singapore Island where he landed on January 29, 1819.

"The island of 'Sincapore' . . . has on its southern shore . . . excellent anchorage and smaller harbours," wrote Raffles, "and seems in every respect most peculiarly adapted for our object. Its position . . . is far more convenient and commanding than even Rhio for our China trade passing down the Straits of Malacca, and every native vessel that sails through the Straits of Rhio must pass in sight of it."

The more he considered it the more determined he became to settle the island. "It positively takes nothing from the Dutch and is to us everything," he wrote. "It gives us the command of China and Japan, with Siam and Cambodia, Cochin China, etc., to say nothing of the Islands themselves."

Singapore Island, about 200 square miles in area and mostly flat, had a population of about 300 fishermen, pearl-hunters and pirates. It was ruled by the Temenggong of Johore, with whom Raffles signed a preliminary agreement that gave the Temenggong British protection and

allowed the British to establish a "factory" or trading station. But there were complications: the Temenggong was a provincial governor, not a sovereign, and without the endorsement of the Sultan of Johore, who owned the island, the "agreement" was questionable.

But there was no Sultan. The old Sultan, Mahmud, had died in 1812, and the throne had remained empty while the succession was disputed by two sons, Tunku Long and Abdul Rahman. Raffles, so close now to realizing a dream, was not to be balked by a petty family quarrel. He decided to create the new Sultan himself. The true heir, the elder son, Tunku Long, lived on a small island in the Dutch-controlled Rhio group. Within 24 hours of Raffles' arrival, a messenger was sent to bring Tunku Long to Singapore "by hook or by crook even if he had only one shirt on his back," according to the enthusiastic memoir of Abdullah, Raffles' clerk.

Tunku Long arrived at Singapore on February 1. Fearing the anger of the Dutch, he was reluctant to be made Sultan. Raffles wooed him, "smiling with infinite charm . . . his words sweet as a sea of honey. . . . The very stones would have melted on hearing his words." Tunku Long melted.

On February 6, 1819, in a hastily improvised ceremony, a treaty drawn up by Raffles was stamped with the seal of the new Sultan, officially titled Hussein of Johore, a sorry-looking figure, dazed and bewildered. Presents were distributed all round, the Union Jack was hoisted, salutes were fired, drinks were served, and toasts were drunk.

Having been on the island just a week, Raffles left Singapore, his "political child," the day after the new Sultan's installation, and hurried back to his job in Bencoolen. "If this last effort to secure our interests fails," he wrote, "I must quit politics and turn philosopher."

The East India Company now found itself in an awkward situation: the Dutch protest was immediate and loud. Malacca had been officially returned to the Dutch in 1816: had not Johore, the Dutch said, therefore reverted to its former conditions of dependency? Did not Singapore belong to Johore? Had not Raffles seized a part of the Dutch Empire?

But the Company, determined not to be further browbeaten by Britain's wartime allies, gave Raffles nothing but praise: "The selection of Singapore is considered highly judicious and your proceedings in establishing a Factory there do honour to your approved skill and ability," Lord Moira informed him. "It is intended to maintain the post of Singapore for the present."

The Dutch did not attack Singapore, as had been feared. Instead, they engaged in a five-year "paper-war" of written protests. But while the "war" was being fought, Singapore began to grow and prosper – and the more it prospered, the more certain the Company felt about the correctness of Raffles' coup.

During a visit to the island, from 1822 to 1823, Raffles diligently began to refine the raw material he had so crudely taken. "Singapore has given us the command of the Archipelago as well in peace as in war," he wrote, "our commerce will extend to every part, and British principles will be known throughout."

He set down plans for the settlement's future: "I have had everything to new-mould from first to last," he wrote to a friend, "to introduce a system of energy, purity and encouragement." He drew up regulations for land registration, port laws were drafted and issued, a provisional code of law based on English Law was established, including laws against gaming, cock-fighting and the slave trade. "All this work," Raffles wrote to a friend in London, "is a pleasant enough duty in England where you have books, hard heads and lawyers to refer to, but here by no means easy, where all must depend on my own judgement and foresight."

All this was important in its way, but it scarcely compared with the significance of his original act of seizing the island in the first place. His simple vision of British economic superiority, his belief in the value of free trade had at one stroke founded a port that needed no further guidance from him to become the magnet for East Indian trade, and thus the political key to the whole area.

Raffles left Singapore for the last time on June 9, 1823. The scene of his departure was highly emotional, attended by "hundreds of people of all races," according to Abdullah, who concluded: "There are many great men besides him, clever, rich and handsome, but in good disposition, amiability and gracefulness, Mr. Raffles had not his equal, and were I to die and live again such a man I could never meet again, my love of him is so great."

Back in Bencoolen, his wife, Sophia, became so ill that Raffles could not wait to get back home to a healthy climate. He himself was oppressed by headaches, the cause of which were undiagnosed at the time; they may have been the result of a brain tumour.

On February 2, 1824, he and his family set off for home in a comfortable vessel, the *Fame*. Besides a cargo of saltpetre, she also carried all of Raffles' latest collection of natural history specimens – hundreds of cases, including a cage that contained a tapir, an animal at that time unknown in England.

On the first night out, disaster struck: he was hurried from his bed by the cry of "Fire!" Within minutes, the *Fame* was blazing from stem to stern and the crew of 40 abandoned ship. They rowed all through the night, returning to Bencoolen the following afternoon.

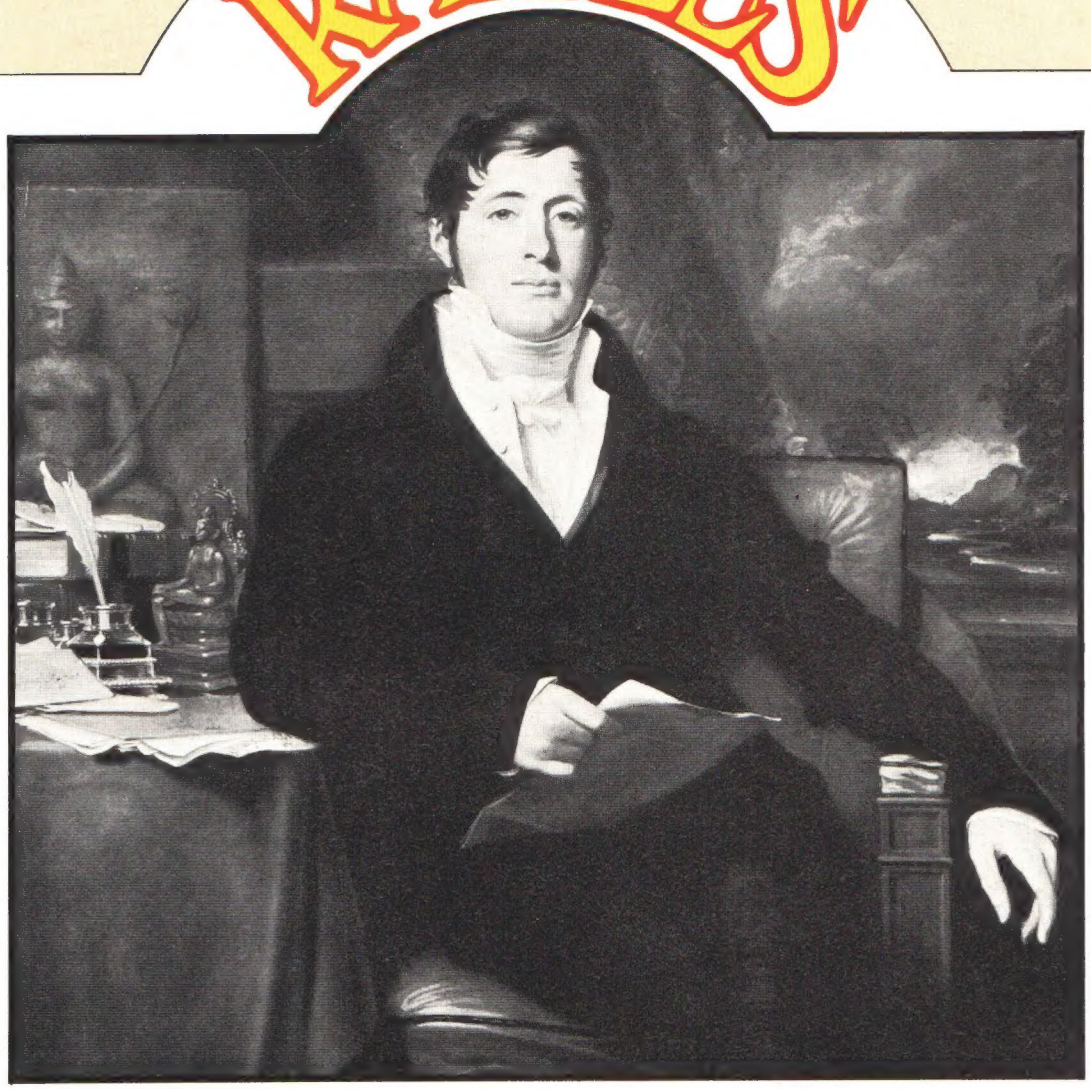
Raffles lost everything: official papers, valuables, notes for books, grammars, dictionaries, maps, more than 2,000 drawings, the whole natural history collection – and the tapir. It took two months before another vessel was found to take Raffles home.

On his arrival in England Raffles was faced with more disasters. A merchant-banker with whom Raffles had lodged £16,000 went bankrupt; he never saw a penny of his savings. And he received no compensation for his losses on the *Fame*. On the contrary: the Company, on examining the salaries and allowances authorized by the Governor-General while Raffles was in service, demanded a *repayment* of £22,000.

He withstood the blow well, for he knew that if he lived he would have appointments with salary enough to pay off the debt. Certainly it did not cloud his enjoyment of London. "After so long a sojourn in the woods and wilds of the East," he wrote, "like a bee, I wander from flower to flower."

Then, suddenly, his brain disease killed him. In the early hours of July 5, 1826, his wife, Sophia, found him lying dead at the bottom of the stairs in his home. It was the day before his 45th birthday ❧

RAFFLES



"They say I am a Spirit that will never allow the East to be quiet," Thomas Stamford Raffles once wrote, with prophetic flamboyance. "Never" was an exaggeration, but his seizure of Singapore in 1819 did make Britain the dominant power in the East Indies for 150 years. He returned home with an enviable reputation: for the cool self-assurance caught in the portrait above, for foresight, for scholarship, for humane administration and for his warmth of personality. As his Malay clerk, Abdullah, affectionately recorded: "Mr. Raffles spoke in smiles."

Breaking the Dutch Monopoly

Raffles' first contact with the East came in 1805 when he was posted by his employer, the East India Company, to Penang in Malaya. Keenly aware of the strategic and commercial possibilities of the East Indies, the 24-year-old Raffles cast a speculative eye on the long, narrow island of Java, which since the 16th Century had been the Dutch headquarters for East India trade. Holland, then occupied by France, was a nominal ally, but Raffles wrote: "From this moment all my views, all my plans, and all my mind were devoted to create such an interest regarding Java as should lead to its annexation to our Eastern Empire."

Raffles master-minded the seizure of Java from the Dutch in 1811, ostensibly to prevent it ever falling into the hands of Napoleonic France. In August, an invasion fleet of 90 ships landed near Batavia. Only 25 days after the landing, the island was claimed for the East India Company, and Raffles placed in sole charge of this important island.

"I am here alone," wrote Raffles happily to a friend, "without any advice, in a new country with a large native population of not less than six or seven millions of people."

It was a heavy responsibility for a young man of 30, but with his customary enthusiasm he flung himself into the government of this "amiable and ingenuous people," gaining the support of the Javanese Regents. He also found the time to compile a massive *History of Java*, which contained comprehensive surveys on everything from geography to courtly customs. In the presence of Regents, he recorded, the lower orders had to conduct all affairs in *basa-krama*, the "language of honour" and from a squatting position known as *dodok*.

In 1816, after four and a half happy years, Raffles was recalled after a dispute with a jealous colleague. On March 25 he, and his collection of manuscripts and specimens, which filled 200 cases and weighed 30 tons, embarked for England.

A Javanese Regent, followed by courtiers and shaded by the *payung* – or state umbrella – strolls through a Dutch estate to visit the owner.

The rivers of Java were the island's commercial highways. Amid the pleasure craft and light boats, larger ships laden with spices and gold were paddled to the coast.

This Javanese garden had been laid out by its Dutch owner in the geometrical style then popular in Europe.

Key to the China Trade

In March, 1818, Raffles, still not completely restored to favour, was posted to the remote out-station of Bencoolen in Sumatra. It was, he said, "the most wretched place I ever beheld": earthquake-shattered, deserted, its roads miry and overgrown. Raffles rapidly rallied from depression to pursue his dream of Empire by agitating for a stronger commercial base in the East. His choice was for Singapore – a flat, swampy island which dominated the major inshore sea-route to China.

Defying the Company's cautious directors, who were wary of challenging the dominant Dutch, Raffles landed on Singapore on January 29, 1819, with 340 sepoys and 100 sailors. Within a week, he had manipulated into power a sultan of his choice and obtained a treaty for a settlement. "Though I may personally suffer in the scuffle," he wrote, "the nation must be benefited."

But it took some time for the nation to recognize his achievement. Only after five years of delicate negotiation with the Dutch did Britain at last give Singapore "certainty of permanent possession."

Raffles found his home in Bencoolen deserted by the official Resident, who had gone on sick leave. The house was hemmed in by jungle and occupied by "ravenous dogs and stinking polecats."

By the 1850s, vessels of all nationalities crowded Singapore's now famous harbour and unloaded their wares along its imposing waterfront. In 30 years, the island's trade had risen from nothing to be worth five million pounds annually.

Raffles' Portable Zoos

In 1824, when Raffles was on his way home, fire swept his vessel, the *Fame*, and destroyed Raffles' latest collection of birds and animals. Within days of escaping the blaze and re-landing in Bencoolen, he set about building a new collection.

The flora and fauna of the East had always fascinated Raffles. Wherever he went he had organized the systematic collection of specimens, some of which are shown below, and in Malacca he kept four servants to help in this task. One prize, named half in his honour, was the *Rafflesia Arnoldi*, whose purple and yellow flower measured a yard across and weighed 15 pounds.

His clerk Abdullah described Raffles' collections: "There were many thousands of specimens of animals stuffed like life . . . hundreds of bottles filled with snakes, scorpions . . . two boxes filled with coral."

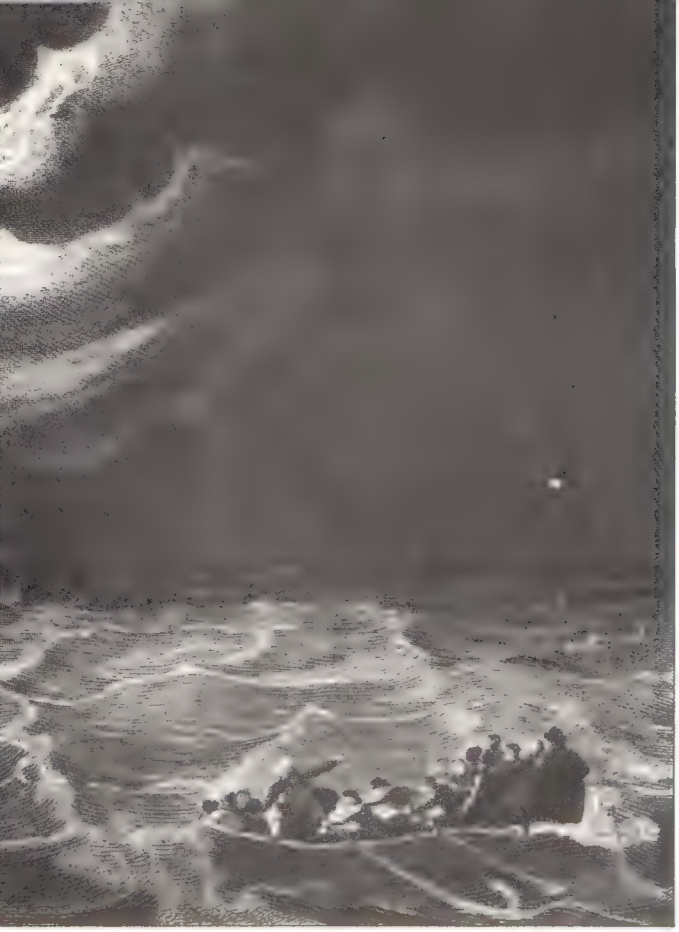
During Raffles' 20 years in the East, tons of crates were dispatched to London. The plants were incorporated in botanical collections and the animals were to form the basis for the London Zoo, of which Raffles became co-founder on his return.

The *Fame* holocaust destroyed birds, animals, and the research of years: notes, maps, 2,000

A predatory bay owl of Sumatra.

A distinctively crested Sumatran partridge.

A sprig of nutmeg.

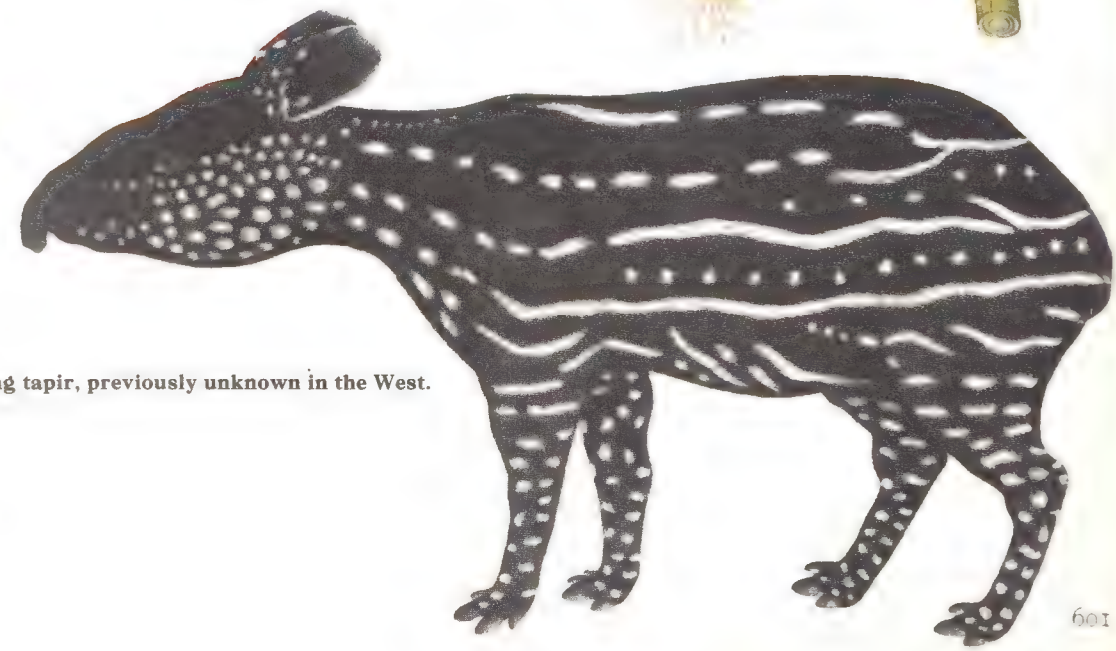


drawings. "All, all has perished," Raffles mourned.

A blue-backed Philippine parrot.

A weasel from Sumatra.

The root, flower and leaf of the turmeric plant.



A young tapir, previously unknown in the West.

London families gape at an elephant in the London Zoo, ten years after it was founded in 1825 by Raffles and Sir Humphry Davy, President of the Royal Society. A bust of Raffles now stands as a memorial in the Lion House.

II. The Legacy of Raffles

For the next 40 years after Raffles' death, the British Straits Settlements – Penang, Malacca and Singapore – continued to develop as flourishing commercial enterprises. It was a comparatively peaceful period during which much of Malaya was recognized as a British sphere of influence by other European powers, and the area's success was staggering. In 1825, Singapore's trade was worth £2,500,000 while Penang and Malacca contributed another £1,500,000. Forty years later, Singapore's trade had risen nearly sixfold to £13,000,000, out of a Straits Settlements total of £18,500,000.

All this was seemingly put at risk in the latter part of the century by two factors: the recurring disputes for leadership among the native states of the peninsula and the rising interest of other European nations eager for new colonial territories. Matters came to a head in the 1870s over the tin-rich province of Perak, a coastal territory adjoining Penang.

When in 1871 the ruler of Perak died, the event plunged the area into a predictable dispute for the succession. To forestall the ambitions of European rivals, the British occupied Perak – the first step in a series of moves that by 1914 was to lead to the imposition of imperial control over all Malaya.

The lever with which Britain could exert influence in Perak was provided by Chinese workers in the province's tin-mines. The Chinese, who had first migrated from China to Singapore – where they became British subjects – and then to Perak, considered they had good reason to claim British protection from the anarchy that threatened them.

The British thus had a powerful influence over Perak's most vital industry and British support for the major contender for the throne, Abdullah, was decisive. Abdullah was crowned, and in return for British support he gave Britain the right to install a British Resident with wide powers of reform and administration.

The first Resident was a man called James Wheeler Birch, a man who had absolutely no knowledge of the land, its people or even its language. In the words of a modern historian, he "dashed into Perak like a Victorian rationalist schoolmaster, confident that decision and firmness would soon remedy abuses."

"I see that nothing but decision is necessary with these people," Birch wrote in his diary soon after his arrival. "It concerns us little what were the customs of the country nor do I think they are worthy of any consideration."

He announced that he would henceforth be responsible for the collection of revenue, and began to stamp out slavery by simply helping fugitives escape. The Perak rulers soon became desperate to be rid of Mr. Birch; some turned to thoughts of assassination while others resorted to witchcraft in an attempt to spirit him out of their world.

In 1875, the British proposed to Abdullah that he hand over the government of his country in exchange for an allowance to him and his subsidiary chiefs. Birch drafted an agreement, and he warned Abdullah that he would be dethroned in favour of a rival if he refused to sign. Abdullah yielded but at that same time he began conspiring with other chiefs to put into effect a long-standing plan to kill the Resident.

On November 2, 1875, Birch arrived at a provincial centre to announce the new system of taxation. He issued a proclamation abolishing the collection of taxes by any authority but the British, and he watched from his boat as notices to this effect were posted by his clerk. He then went to bathe in the river, discreetly hidden from view by the palm-leaf walls of a makeshift hut. While he was splashing about in the river, a group of assassins stormed the village, tore down the notices, stabbed the clerk, and demolished the hut with a few sword-strokes. One of the assassins leaped forward and cut down Birch where he stood in the water with a single blow on the head with a sword.

The Governor at Singapore immediately dispatched 150 troops to Perak to hunt the murderers down. A thoroughly organized campaign was mounted, backed by a show of strength unprecedented in Malaya with the arrival of a thousand soldiers from India. Three Malay chiefs were hanged. Abdullah was banished to the Seychelles; but it took several years to salve the deeply felt Malayan resentment. An investigating commission later commented: "It must be admitted that the provocation was given to the Sultan and his chiefs. The late Mr. Birch was a most zealous officer . . . and there is reason to believe that his manner may at times have been overbearing."

The Perak "war" was a highly effective display of British determination; and the presence of troops specially imported from India was an equally effective indication of the power of British ambition.

The mistakes of Perak were not repeated, nor was there any further use of military force, but a process of steady penetration was continued for another 30 years until, by 1914, all of the Malayan states had become subjected to British "protection and advice."

There was no withstanding the onslaught of British colonial rule, whose effects in Malaya were assessed by one administrator, Hugh Clifford: "We English have an immense deal to answer for – we come into a country which is racked and ruined with war and rapine, and after making a little war of our own, to help set things straight, we reduce the land to a dead monotony of order."

Many of the nine native states acquired permanent British Residents, who were in effect local rulers. The basis for their authority was vague in the extreme. They were officially advisers to the Rajahs, who were supposed to act upon the Residents' advice. In fact, the administrative machinery did not exist for Rajahs to act upon anything other than custom. As one adviser said, the Resident had first "to create the Government to be advised." It was exactly the sort of challenge welcomed by colonial administrators, and two men in particular, Hugh Low and Sir Frank Swettenham, seized their opportunities. Their work created the basis of British rule in the Malay states for 60 years.

Low, Resident in Perak from 1877 to 1889, had worked quietly for 30 years in Labuan, Borneo. At the age of 53, he was snatched out of his backwater and thrust into the tide-race of anarchy in Perak. He steadily set to work to resolve Perak's post-war turmoil, creating local governments responsible to a central council, involving the chiefs and winning their respect and co-operation. Tin-mining

companies invested capital with a newfound confidence and Perak's revenue rose fivefold in ten years. Roads and telegraph-lines soon connected Perak to the outside world and assured the province's transformation into a relatively well-developed state.

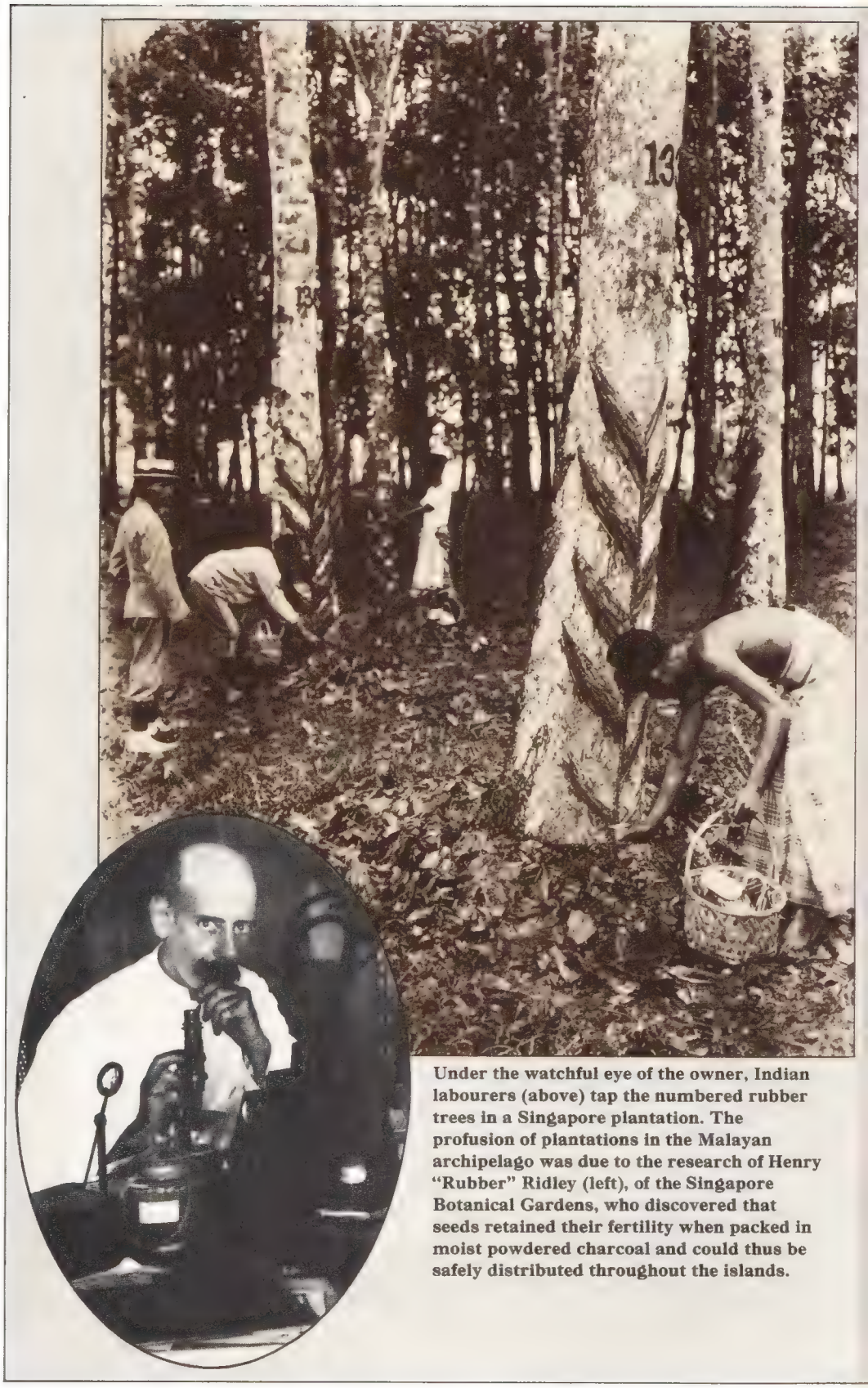
Sir Frank Swettenham, ambitious and autocratic, forged the federation of four major states – Perak, Selangor, Pahang and Negri Sambilan – in 1896. Then, as Governor of the new entity, the Federated Malay States, he sought to establish British influence over the unfederated states to the north and east, traditionally under the influence of neighbouring Siam. So assiduously did he work that the Foreign Secretary, Lord Curzon, characterized him as "a swashbuckler of a most truculent type." Eventually, in 1909, Siam agreed to recognize British authority in these states in exchange for a £4,000,000 loan. (The last independent state, Johore, was incorporated into Sir Frank Swettenham's loosely organized system in 1914.)

The profound change which the British had initiated in the whole fabric of Malayan society intensified when, at the turn of the century, a new commodity was introduced into the country's economy – rubber.

Its eventual success was largely due to Henry Ridley, Director of Gardens at Singapore: "It was his practice to stuff seeds into the pockets of planters and others, begging them to make a trial," a Chinese merchant recalled, "and among planters he earned the soubriquet of 'Mad Ridley' or 'Rubber Ridley'."

In 1905, Malaya produced only 200 tons of rubber. But in 1910, a boom began, and by 1920, the country was exporting more than 200,000 tons annually. It became the government's largest single source of revenue. And its disruption of the long-established patterns of Malayan agricultural life was to become the source of future strife.

As though overnight, the historical role of Raffles' Singapore was dramatically altered: until 1900, it had been "the Gateway to the East," a grandiose port of call. In the next 20 years, while still at its height as a great port – used by more than 50 different shipping lines – it became a source of supply, an integral, essential part of Western technology ❧



Under the watchful eye of the owner, Indian labourers (above) tap the numbered rubber trees in a Singapore plantation. The profusion of plantations in the Malayan archipelago was due to the research of Henry "Rubber" Ridley (left), of the Singapore Botanical Gardens, who discovered that seeds retained their fertility when packed in moist powdered charcoal and could thus be safely distributed throughout the islands.

Sheets of rubber hang to dry in a factory after being pressed between rollers.

The Birth of the Rubber Boom

Rubber, the mainstay of Malayan economy, originally came from South America. This odd, elastic substance – first seen by Europeans in 1495, when Christopher Columbus was shown a bouncing rubber ball – was widely used in the western world by the mid-19th Century. It was essential for the manufacture of wellington boots, hose pipes, surgical bandages, waterproof clothes and bicycle tyres.

Demand was so great that rubber could clearly become of vast economic importance to the Empire. In 1876, Henry Wickham, a self-important young adventurer living in Brazil, managed to smuggle down the Amazon a shipload of 70,000 seeds packed between layers of dried banana leaves. There were no laws against taking rubber seeds from Brazil, but Wickham knew there soon would be if he was caught with such a massive amount. Besides, speed was essential to prevent the seeds spoiling. Wickham hurried his cargo over to Kew Gardens, where frail orchids and hibiscus were tossed out of hothouses to make way for the rubber seeds.

Within two weeks the seeds were sprouting and 2,000 sturdy young seedlings were shipped to the East. Gradually, Malaya's high-quality plantation rubber began to replace coarser wild rubber of Brazil. By 1909, 40 million trees had been planted in orderly groves over 250,000 acres. Jungles were razed, orchards felled and paddy fields drained to make way for the lucrative rubber tree. Coffee planters became rubber planters and thousands of Indian and Chinese labourers – 387,000 in 1907 – were imported to collect the precious substance. By 1920 the country was supplying 175,000 tons a year – half the world's total.

A young Tamil girl collects the liquid rubber in a cup in the early morning when the flow of rubber is greatest.

III. The White Rajahs of Sarawak

At the height of his fame, Raffles of Singapore was a hero to the young – and few worshipped more ardently than James Brooke, who was the first of the "White Rajahs" of Sarawak.

Born in 1803 near Benares, the son of an East India Company civilian servant, Brooke joined the army at the age of 16. But there was little in the idea of a life spent as an army officer to excite his brilliant, violent imagination; he longed to rid himself of authoritarian shackles; he craved lone adventure.

Inspired by Raffles' famous articles on Borneo, Brooke developed an ambitious scheme for a British settlement in the north of the island. If the idea had been put forward by anyone else it would have been dismissed as the wild dream of a romantic young madman: but Brooke's own absolute conviction of its worth was infectious; and when he published an outline of his proposals, he proved that he had as well a remarkable knowledge of the Far East and its special problems. He also let it be known that he was prepared to invest in the project himself: he had inherited a large sum when his father died in 1835, and he already owned a 142-ton schooner called the *Royalist*.

Brooke and his scheme attracted considerable attention in London – and the Dutch duly noted the appearance of yet another dangerous young English adventurer on the stage of Far Eastern affairs.

Brooke was Raffles' true disciple: he believed that commercial prosperity could only be guaranteed by territorial possession; and, like Raffles, he believed that "any government instituted for the purpose must be directed to the advancement of the native interests and the development of native resources, rather than by a flood of European colonization to aim at possessions only, without reference to the indefeasible rights of the Aborigines."

The *Royalist* set sail for the East on a voyage of reconnaisance on October 26, 1838. The territory Brooke had decided to investigate first was the province of Sarawak, in the shrivelled remains of the once rich and powerful empire of the Sultans of Brunei of western Borneo.

Brunei, which extended along Borneo's northern shore, was ruled by a feeble-minded, Sultan, Omar Ali, who was a freak: he had two thumbs on his right hand. There was hardly any system of government; what there was, was cruel and corrupt. The Muslim overlords apparently lived only in order to intrigue against each other and to extort as much as they could from the weaker indigenous races such as the gentle Land Dyaks and Muruts, and, to a lesser extent, from fiercer tribes such as the Kayans and the much-feared head-hunting Sea Dyaks (or Ibans).

When Brooke arrived there, the country was in a state of incredible chaos. Any semblance of order had completely disappeared; the Land Dyaks were in open rebellion against the Sultan. Civil war between various Bornean tribes raged across the province; and piracy along the coast, continually increasing in strength and ferocity, seriously undermined the Sultan's authority, and threatened the immediate future of his regime.

Brooke threw himself into this complicated turmoil and hustle for power with an energy that even Raffles might have envied. He aligned himself with the Sultan's heir, the Rajah Muda Hasim – who was also the Sultan's Regent in Sarawak – a nervous, weak-willed, easily malleable middle-aged man. Brooke quickly made his gifts for organization and the resources of the *Royalist* indispensable for the suppression of the Dyaks and the pirates. So much so that Hasim – fearing the Englishman was only a transient adventurer – offered to invest him with the province of Sarawak and confer on him the title of Rajah as a reward for his continued support.

Brooke wanted the territory; and the title must have been tempting. He conducted the campaign against the rebels with even greater diligence. As success became more certain, Hasim began to harbour doubts about his promise – he was the heir, but he had no legal right to dispose of Brunei territory in any manner he wished. When Brooke claimed his promised reward, all he could extract from the unforthcoming Hasim was a permit to settle in Sarawak.

Brooke was furious, but he reacted with inspired pragmatism. He immediately set out to win over the warring factions of the province. The Land Dyaks and Chinese (who had several settlements in the country) soon regarded him as their deliverer. He developed excellent relations with the Malay chiefs. He even met and talked to members of a fleet of the dreaded Sea Dyak pirates, whose behaviour he found to be quite peaceable when they were approached in a spirit of cooperation and friendship.

Having secured his reputation, Brooke sailed to Kuching. He sighted the *Royalist*'s guns on Hasim's palace, landed with a small force, and requested an immediate interview with the bewildered and frightened Regent. Brooke was by nature incapable of under-selling himself: when he outlined to Hasim the exact strength of his position in Sarawak, he managed to convey the impression that he was capable of taking the country by force as a rebel leader.

On November 24, 1841, in a long and elaborate ceremony, Brooke was proclaimed Rajah and Governor of Sarawak, an appointment later confirmed by Hasim's overlord in Brunei. In return for his newly-acquired privileges, the White Rajah agreed to pay the Sultan of Brunei a small annual sum and to respect the laws and religions of the country.

The fact that a young white Englishman had become the ruler of a "primitive" wilderness in a strategically important part of the Far East should have been sensational news in London: incredibly, no public notice was taken.

The Dutch were greatly alarmed; but the British government took the view that it was an "incident," an example of energetic private enterprise. Brooke, after all, had never had official backing. It might eventually prove to be profitable to the government. But, equally, it could prove to be disagreeable, particularly if the Dutch chose to intervene. There was nothing to be gained one way or the other by condoning or condemning Brooke's actions until it could be established whether or not Sarawak had any real importance.

Physically, Borneo was an unfriendly island, and the part that Brooke had taken very much resembled Captain Daniel Beekman's description of it in the 17th Century: "Many score Miles near the Sea the Country looks like a Forest,

While James Brooke leans intently towards the diminutive Sultan of Brunei, an interpreter spells out the terms of the treaty between the two that confirmed Brooke as Rajah of the Sultan's province of Sarawak.

being full of prodigious tall trees, between which is nothing but vast swamps of Mud. At high Water you may sail in a great way among these Trees in several places, but at low Water it is all Mud, upon which the Sun (especially in the Equinox) darting his scorching Beams perpendicularly, raises noisome Vapours, Fogs, etc. which afterwards turn into most violent Showers, that fall more like Cataracts than rain."

It was a country of few natural resources, it could not support a large population, and as a viable commercial enterprise in a highly competitive area it was not an attractive proposition.

The odds were all against Brooke: he had only a slight knowledge of Malay; he had no administrative experience; he knew nothing about commerce; and he was entirely dependent on the few English advisers he had gathered around him.

It was a peculiar life, full of odd events and adventures. Once Brooke was asked to deliver judgement on a crocodile that had eaten a man; and he had to ask himself seriously whether he could condemn a royal beast that had acted in accordance with its instincts. In the end, he did. On another occasion, a local chieftain Linggir, accompanied by 80 armed men, stormed Brooke's house during dinnertime with the clear intention of murdering every Englishman in sight. Help arrived just in time and Linggir was forced to retreat. But it was an unnerving experience for Brooke to watch the chief slinking away into the shadows swearing that one day he would have the Rajah's head, and waving the basket in which he intended keeping it as a souvenir.

Brooke's administration was, for its time, just. It was based on protecting the oppressed Dyaks, encouraging Chinese merchants, and welcoming all commerce from anywhere so long as it did not interfere with the interests of the natives. He issued a code of law which followed traditional patterns: serious crimes were to be punished in accordance with traditional Brunei principles (the *Ondong-ondong*). All men of all races were free to work and trade without restriction. Roads and waterways were kept open and guarded from misuse. Taxation was fixed at a stated yearly amount.

But the future of the settlement was desperately uncertain, for it needed financial backing and protection from pirates, and Brooke's pleas fell on deaf ears in London. The government refused to commit itself. Brooke felt stranded: he could not even expect help from other Western powers, such as the Dutch. Even if they were interested they would not risk conflict with England by interfering in a territory that was the personal creation of an Englishman, and therefore a potential British interest.

From the beginning of his rule, and for many decades to come, Brooke's major problem and primary concern was the permanent elimination of pirates from the Borneo waters.

His early sorties against the pirates, using his one ship and a few Dyak boats, were as futile as sand against the wind. But in 1843, the Royal Navy, acting in the general interests of British Far Eastern trade, joined Brooke in the first of a series of campaigns that effectively cleared the seas of what had until then been an ever-present hazard. At home, Brooke's own writings on pirate-hunters caught the imagination of the public: *The Expedition to Borneo of H.M.S. Dido for the Suppression of Piracy*, published in 1846 and containing dramatic extracts from Brooke's own racy journal, made sensational reading and quickly ran to three editions.

A few weeks later, Brooke faced his most decisive political problem.

The ageing Sultan of Brunei had fallen under the influence of an adopted son, Hashim Jelal, and an adventurer called Haji Seman. Together, the three conspired to get rid of Hasim, and his many brothers – all of whom stood in legitimate line to the throne – thus clearing a path to power for Jelal. There followed an appalling massacre, carried out in the dead of night: most of the princes were slaughtered where they slept; one of the brothers, Bedruddin, unable to hold his attackers off, blew himself up with a keg of gunpowder, together with his sister and a wife; Hasim, wounded, managed to escape, was caught again and, rather than be killed, shot himself.

With Hasim dead, Brooke's territory and title were in jeopardy. It was rumoured that the Sultan was about to attack Brooke's capital at Kuching. Anxious weeks passed as Brooke sought help from the British, for he had to persuade them that the outcome of the crisis

could be advantageous to the Empire. Eventually, he was given the support he needed, and on July 8, 1846, a small British armada, the Royal Navy's China squadron, sailed into Brunei Bay. There was very little resistance; the Sultan and much of the population had fled in terror on Brooke's arrival.

Brooke brought the Sultan to his knees: the old man was forced to do penance at the graves of his victims, and write a letter of apology to Queen Victoria. And then Brooke extracted from him confirmation of his title to Sarawak. The terrified Sultan went even further: he granted Brooke full sovereign rights without tribute, and almost forced on him the mining rights of all his dominions. Finally, Brooke "persuaded" the Sultan to allow the British to annex the island of Labuan where valuable coal deposits had been discovered.

James Brooke now had a kingdom – and it was a legal reality. But when he returned to England the same year, he found that an important section of British Liberal opinion was sincerely shocked at the bloody campaigns he described in the book he had written.

Rajah Brooke was certainly a remarkable man, an outraged Liberal said in a Parliamentary Debate, but "anyone with a spark of humanity must shudder to read of the massacres perpetrated . . . during the operations against the so-called pirates of Borneo."

Brooke's reputation seemed tarnished beyond repair. Nevertheless, like Raffles in a similar situation, he became a national hero. When he visited London in 1847 he was given the Freedom of the City; he was awarded an honorary degree from Oxford University; and in 1848 he was granted a knighthood.

But he never became quite respectable. The British government still refused him official recognition: he was made Governor of Labuan and Consul-General for the British at Brunei – posts which at least earned him a salary. He was not referred to as the Rajah of Sarawak until 17 years later, in 1863, five years before he died.

By then it looked as though Brooke's strange empire might survive. It was still very poor – it would never become rich – but the founding of the Borneo Company in 1856 had given it a solid basis for a future permanent economy. It had survived several small rebellions – and one major uprising: in 1857, following hard on riots in Canton and Singapore, the Sarawak Chinese joined invading forces in a devastating attack on the province that lasted for several weeks and resulted in thousands of deaths and the total destruction of virtually all major public buildings and facilities. In the critical months that followed, Brooke and his domain were completely dependent on wealthy London friends and admirers.

The little state had even survived the question of the Rajah's succession and the incessant jealous squabbles and petty bickering among the eligible members of Brooke's family.

James Brooke died on June 11, 1868, and was succeeded by his nephew, Charles. Charles, "an enlightened despot," reigned until 1917. It was a period marked by steady growth in Sarawak. Except for a few early – and unsuccessful – expeditions against the head-hunters, Charles' reign was a relatively undramatic period, a time of organization and consolidation, and care of the ever-feeble economy. A French visitor to Sarawak in 1884 reported that "thirty Englishmen, no more, govern and administer the country, and that with only a few hundred native soldiers and policemen, and almost without written laws. A handful of men of a strange race is blindly obeyed by 300,000 Asiatics: to what must we attribute this great result if not to the justice and the extreme simplicity of the Government?"

The key word was "simplicity." Justice, in fact was still very arbitrary in many areas and slavery continued until 1886. Head-hunting still took place occasionally and the country was probably more "primitive" and "backward" than any other in the Far East ruled by Westerners. But generally it was peaceful, and this was due to the fact that Charles followed the first Rajah's policy of exaggerated caution about instituting innovation.

There were two important developments during this period which greatly altered Sarawak's standing and potential prosperity. In 1888 the province was finally made a British Protectorate, acquiring all the privileges and protection James Brooke had asked for 40 years earlier. Then rubber was planted and proved successful as a major factor in the otherwise poor economy.

The third and last of the "White Rajahs" was Charles Vyner Brooke, who succeeded his father on May 24, 1917. He was an easy-going, relaxed, uncomplicated ruler, who fulfilled his task in the slightly careless style of the day. He ruled at a time when the Far East lived in constant fear of war with Japan.

The whole of Borneo was occupied by the Japanese from December, 1941, to May, 1945. There was a great deal of fighting and the island's people suffered tremendous hardships. The death-toll was very high. The Rajah, who had reached safety in Sydney, lost the last bit of contact with his people.

When he returned in 1946, it was only to abdicate. He had decided to surrender Sarawak to the Crown. There were many practical reasons for such an act: but the dominant factor in the Rajah's decision was the fact that he distrusted his heir.

He announced his decision to his people on February 6, 1946, and reminded them: "It is the case in Sarawak that all authority derives from the Rajah. The people trust the Rajah and what the Rajah advises for the people is the will of the people. I am spokesman of the people's will. No other than myself has right to speak on your behalf. No one of you will question whatever I do in his high interest." But the people of Sarawak felt abandoned, betrayed and bitter.

The Brooke dynasty ended officially on July 1, 1946, when Sarawak became a possession of the British Crown. It was the creation of a romantic egoist, a great man in many respects, whose main achievement was in carrying out his declared intentions, and whose motives were inspired by an overwhelming passion for the Orient and an absolute conviction that he had a mission there. The survival of this principality for more than a hundred years – against all odds, without any known modern parallel, in an area where it could hardly have been expected to last one year – remains one of the most remarkable monuments to private enterprise and determination on record: a monument that might have been dedicated to Stamford Raffles.

BROOKE

When James Brooke was appointed ruler of Sarawak by the Sultan of Brunei, he opened a unique chapter in imperial history. A gentleman-adventurer of private means, he rejected a life of ease and devoted himself to bringing peace to an area riven by piracy, head-hunting and slavery. With little help from Britain, he pacified Sarawak, won the love of his people, persuaded Britain to recognize his rule and in doing so established a dynasty that was to last until the Second World War.

The Pirate Menace of the Borneo coast

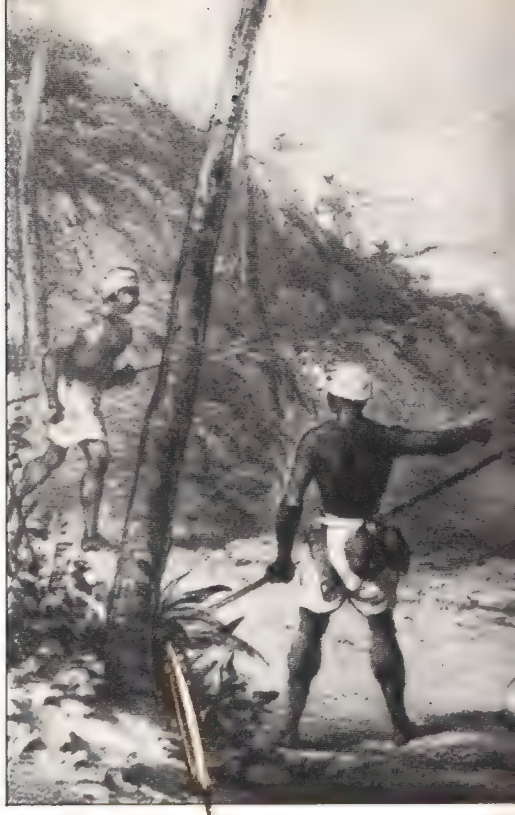
For the pirates who infested the seas of the Malay archipelago, their way of life was a glorious one. Many young men joyfully embraced the prospect of such a career, with its own traditional standards which measured status and honour due in pots of gold plundered and the number of crew murdered. And so respectable an occupation was it that acquisitive princes, nobles and petty chiefs would themselves assemble fleets of pirate prahus, light, oared, swift craft.

From their secret hide-outs tucked away in the creeks that interlaced the islands, the fleets sailed out to waylay cargo vessels. Opium, silver, gold, jewellery and guns – all these made acceptable loot. But the highest prizes of all were the passengers who could be sold as slaves to the Chinese. The greatest demand was for the tough, woolly-haired Papuans of New Guinea; but all good-looking girls, of any race, were treated with care: the Chinese settlers, who were not allowed by law to take women out of China, would give a good price for them at the Batavian market.

The fate of the crew, and the passengers if they resisted, was even less happy. The pirates, armed with muskets, spears, krises (curved daggers), and bearing large bamboo shields to protect themselves, indulged in orgies of mutilation and murder when they boarded the captive craft. Typical of their atrocities was an incident on the barque *Regina*, wrongly believed to be carrying silver dollars, captured in the 1830s. The Captain, James Ross, after being ordered to disclose the non-existent hiding-place, was forced to watch as his young son was tied to the anchor and thrown overboard. Ross's fingers were then cut off joint by joint and he was subjected to further tortures until he died.

Soon after Brooke's arrival, his skills were recognized by the local ruler, the Rajah Muda Hassim. Brooke found him infuriatingly evasive: despite his admiration of Brooke, he was nervous of abandoning any of his own authority and fearful of antagonizing his overlord in Brunei. Brooke finally managed to win the authority he sought, but only by threatening to return to England. For the pirates, it was the beginning of the end.

Rajah Muda Hassim engineered Brooke's appointment as Rajah of Sarawak after Brooke helped him put down a rebellion there.



A pirate band of Sea Dyaks shower down poisoned arrows from blowpipes as Brooke's forces storm a stronghold in one of the earliest anti-piracy operations.

Two pirate prahus make a misguided attack on Brooke's own vessel, the *Jolly Bachelor*. The incident ended with Brooke blasting one prahu out of the water.

A pirate armed with spear, dagger and curved kris, poses in his loose fighting clothes for this portrait.

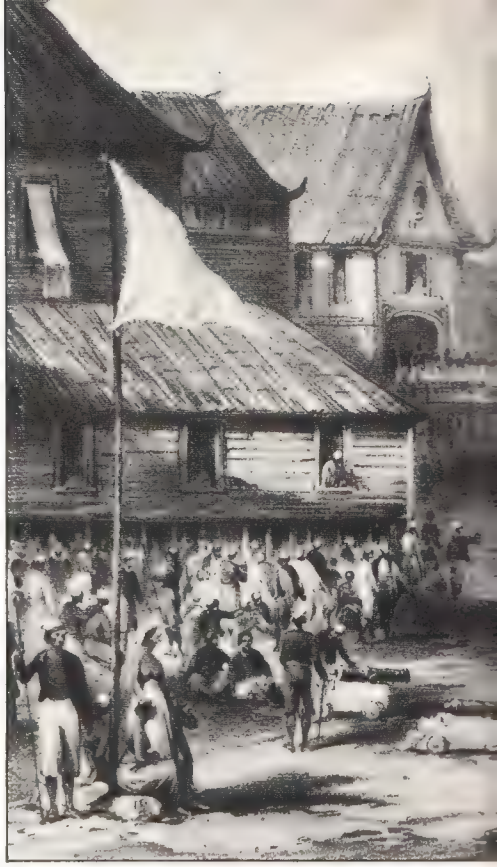
The Bringer of Peaceful Trade

In his great spring-cleaning of the seas, Brooke enlisted the aid of Sir Henry Keppel, commander of H.M.S. *Dido*. In May, 1843, a small force from the *Dido*, together with Brooke's *Jolly Bachelor* and a fleet of native prahus – full of Dyaks eager for the heads and plunder of the pirates – swept up the Sarebas River. The manœuvre, the first in a six-year campaign, was a resounding triumph. The pirate forts were stormed by the blue-jacketed soldiers in a frontal assault which so alarmed the pirates that they turned tail and fled to the safety of their villages without any attempt to retaliate.

Brooke used his campaign against piracy, which was of enormous benefit to Britain's Eastern trade, as a counter in his struggle to gain British recognition for his rule over Sarawak and to persuade the Government to take over the nearby island of Labuan as a coaling station. This, he said, would give steam vessels a base from which to continue the anti-piracy campaign and would also give Britain an entrée to Borneo. In 1846, Labuan was finally made part of the British Empire and Brooke left for England to make a personal plea at Whitehall for Sarawak's right to the same treatment.

While he was away, piracy broke out again. Seriff Osman, a pirate chief, sent a defiant message to another of Brooke's colleagues, Rear Admiral Sir Thomas Cochrane: "I care not for all the ships of the British Navy: let them come" – a rash challenge: Cochrane's force smashed Osman's stronghold within a matter of months.

On Brooke's return from England in 1848, he assembled a large fleet and 3,000 native troops, determined to eliminate finally the pirate threat. In the battle which followed, a 4,000-strong pirate force was scattered by the guns of the British vessels. The ensuing expeditions to flush the remaining pirates from the Bornean creeks took on the air of a triumphal progress, as rajahs and chiefs surrendered one after another. By the end of August, 1849, piracy was dead.



Captain Henry Keppel (inset), commander of H.M.S. *Dido* – seen below moored in the harbour at Sarawak – was Brooke's first official colleague in the struggle against pirates.

A fleet of Brooke's boats draw into Brunei to impose peace after the area had been racked by dynastic disputes. At the arrival of the British, the Sultan fled into the jungle, but re-emerged some days later and, in return for British support for his position at Brunei, agreed to the session of Labuan.

With hundreds of British soldiers on parade and flag-bedecked ships in the background, the British took possession of Labuan on Christmas Eve, 1846. Despite opposition from the taciturn Sir Edward Belcher (left), who after a casual survey pronounced the island of Labuan worthless, Brooke's empire-building arguments had won the day.

Head-Hunters of the Interior

Though Brooke brought peace to the coasts and rivers of Sarawak – indeed to much of Borneo – there was little he could do to civilize the head-hunting Dyaks of the inland regions. He talked endlessly of "opening up" the interior to trade as a means of bringing the Dyaks the blessings of civilization – peace, justice and the abolition of slavery and head-hunting. But the age-old way of life and culture of the primitive Dyak tribes of the interior resisted change.

The Dyaks could, apparently, have lived quite peacefully. For most of the time, they were happy enough as cultivators in their communal village "long-houses." But ancient tradition also imposed on them the duty of head-hunting among their neighbours. Though many tribes begged for Brooke's protection, many others, he records, "were eternally requesting to go for heads, and their urgent entreaties often bore resemblance to children crying after sugar plums."

Brooke, nevertheless, had a deep affection for his people, and in the words of Alfred Wallace, a friend of Brooke, the Dyaks returned the affection and "naturally concluded that he was a superior being, come down on earth to confer blessings on the afflicted."

The dried heads of vanquished warriors dangle from a pole in an Iban village. The Ibans, or Sea Dyaks, spurred on by their women-folk, relished the opportunities offered by piracy to hunt heads.

The gallery of a Dyak "long house" served as a common room for all the families.

Dyak women of the Klemantan tribe sought to enhance their beauty with ivory bracelets and copper ear-rings – often weighing two pounds – that dangled from their stretched earlobes.

Two of these Iban women at a tribal celebration hold human heads that make a barbaric contrast to the sophisticated decoration of their ornate sarongs.

Two Dyak smiths use stone hammers to form hot metal into tools and weapons. A third Dyak melts more iron ore with an ingenious system of cylinders, whose pistons – raised and lowered by hand – blast air to fan the flames to white heat.

IV. King of the Cocos Islands

The would-be Utopia set up on the Cocos (or Keeling) Islands by John Clunies-Ross in 1827 was another example – a bizarre, though minor one – of the Empire-building spirit of the era.

Lying in the middle of the Indian Ocean, 1,200 miles south-west of Singapore and 550 miles west of the Christmas Islands, the Cocos Islands were first discovered in 1609 by Captain William Keeling of the East India Company. The group consists of 27 small coral islands in two separate atolls. The largest island, Home Island, covers an area of barely five square miles.

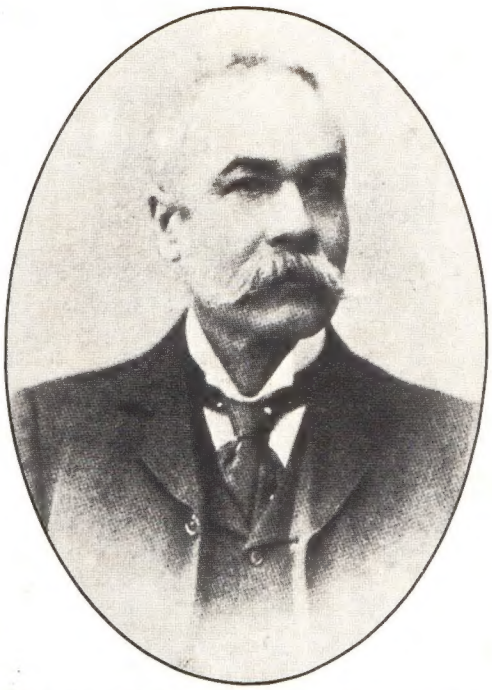
No one has ever been able to say why John Clunies-Ross chose to take possession of these particular islands. Was it their beauty? Their isolation? Because they were uninhabited, or because he wanted to escape from the world as it was elsewhere? All these are plausible reasons, but Clunies-Ross himself never offered an explanation.

He was born in a crofter's cottage on the island of Yell in the Shetlands in 1785. He went to sea early and worked mostly on whaling ships. In 1813, while in the Pacific, he took a post on the brig *Olivia*. The ship was owned by a merchant called Alexander Hare.

Hare, an acquaintance of Raffles, took Clunies-Ross with him as second-in-command when he took over the Bandjermasin settlement on the south coast of Borneo on behalf of the East India Company. Hare was a charming, idle and dishonest adventurer, with no sense of discipline and less of duty: he ran the settlement for his own profit rather than the Company's – and spent the proceeds on building a ship (for himself). The station lost money, and when it began to emerge as a subject of political contention with the Dutch, the British government was eager to let it go.

Hare and Clunies-Ross then apparently decided to form a partnership and establish themselves in business. They planned to buy pepper and spices in the East when the prices were low, store them at Cocos, and ship the cargo to England at the first news of a shortage. The first attempt was undertaken by Clunies-Ross in Hare's new ship the *Borneo*.

At this stage, neither Clunies-Ross nor Hare had settled on the islands. And when Clunies-Ross reached the islands on the return voyage from England in February, 1827 – accompanied by his wife, mother-in-law, and several possible colonists – he was astonished to find Hare already in residence.



The patriarchal John Clunies-Ross founded his own colony on the Cocos Islands.

Hare had with him a few manservants, and a very large harem which he described as his "fiddle-faddle, which, whether wise or no, he was in the habit of considering necessary." His harem included women from Sumatra, Borneo, Bali, Java, Celebes, China, New Guinea, South Africa and India. Hare saw himself as an Oriental potentate, whose "greatest feature," according to Clunies-Ross "was his licentiousness in regard to all bodily indulgences."

Hare settled on one island with his women; and Clunies-Ross settled on another (the largest one). With a few Malay servants, he set out producing coconuts which were then shipped to Singapore (in the *Borneo*, which he refused to hand back). It was a primitive, hard, monotonous life – but it was *his*. Hare's presence in the islands was a constant source of irritation. He had too many women without men, and Clunies-Ross had too many men without women. The men made raids on Hare's harem and brought the women back to Clunies-Ross's island: when Hare demanded their release, Clunies-Ross refused. The friction continued for two to three years until finally Hare retreated to Batavia, where he died in 1832.

Darwin visited the islands in 1836 on his famous voyage in the *Beagle* to study the formation of the coral atolls. At that time, Home Island had a population of 175, only 20 of whom were Europeans. Darwin noted that Clunies-Ross lived in "a large barn-like house open at both ends, lined with mats of woven bark."

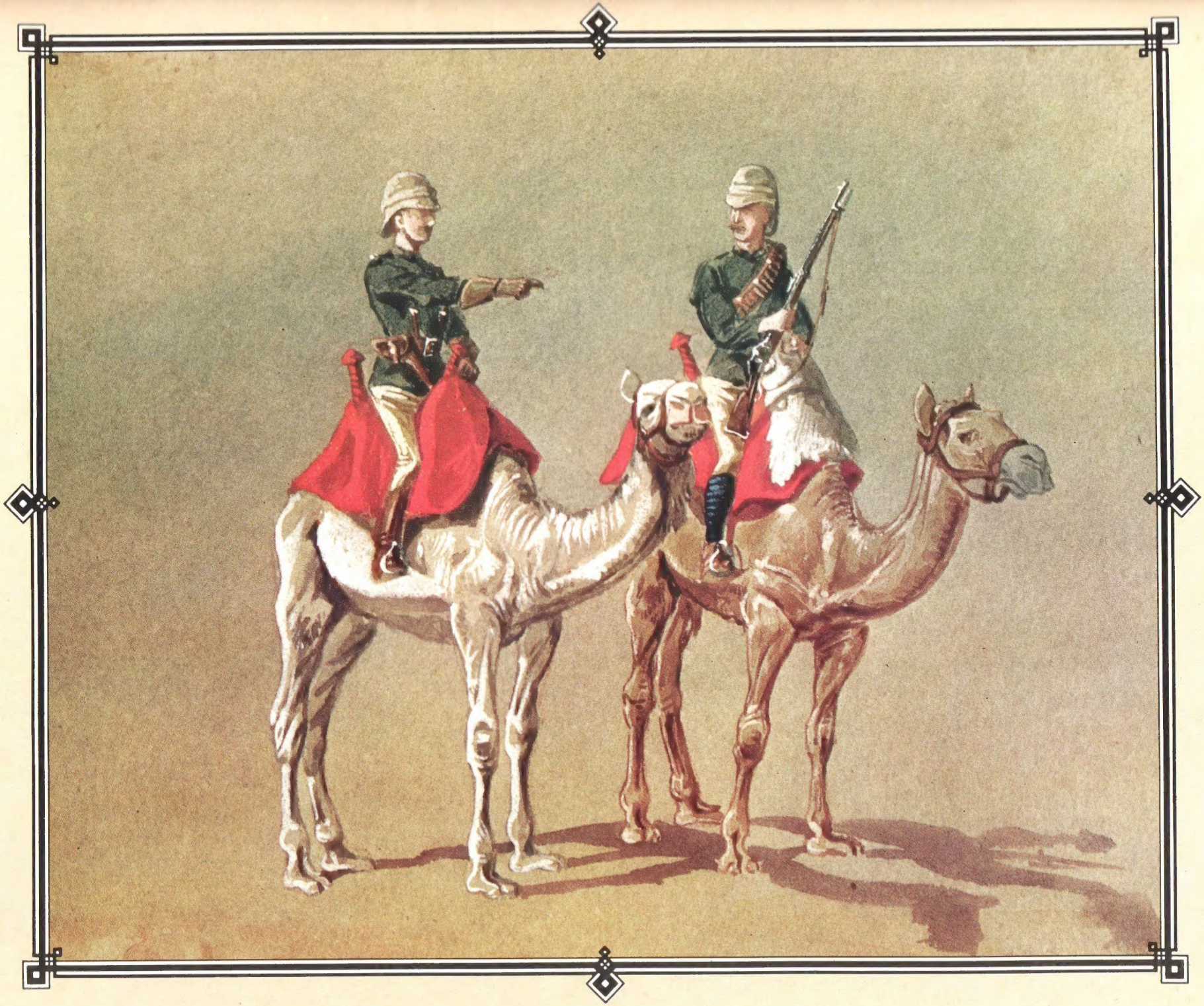
Darwin found this Scottish Utopia depressing, gloomy, unhappy. "The Malays are now nominally free," he wrote, "so far as regards their personal treatment; but in most other points they are considered as slaves."

Like Brooke in Sarawak, Clunies-Ross spent futile years trying to acquire British protection for the islands. In a letter of appeal in November, 1827, he declared: "We intend no injury to any but rather rest on the truly Pious Principle 'Peace on Earth, and goodwill towards all mankind'; whilst our exertions may in time become productive of some considerable accession to the commerce of the British Empire, and contribute to the extension of her population, her language, and her true glory and grandeur."

Like other settlers of the time, Clunies-Ross had a sharply developed sense of duty and purpose – but unlike Raffles and Brooke, he had no clearly envisaged mission. Because of this, life on the islands tended to stagnate.

Clunies-Ross died in 1854, three years before the islands became part of the British Empire. In 1886, the administration of the islands was placed under the supervision of the Straits Settlements, and Queen Victoria granted George Clunies-Ross, the grandson, the lands of the islands in perpetuity. The Clunies-Ross family continued to live and work on the islands and remained undisturbed until 1941, when an R.A.F. base was established there.

In 1955, the islands became part of Australia – but the transfer was made only on the condition that the Clunies-Ross lands were allowed to remain in the control of the family and its successors.



Heavy Camel Corps, Sudan, 1884

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE

THE INDIAN MUTINY

SHOCK REVOLT, SAVAGE RETRIBUTION